

# UNIVERSE



DIRECT EDITION

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KRUEGER  
BRADY  
ILLUSTRATION

"It doesn't matter whether mutaninity reverts back to humanity or if they remain as they are."

"Why not, old friend? Please speak without fearing my reaction. For I am stone and will outlive you all."

"It's not that. I'm not trying to protect you again. The reason New York is freezing over while the Arctic is beginning to thaw is because the elements themselves cannot support what has happened to our world. Something has changed the planet. Soon, Earth won't be capable of sustaining life regardless of what humanity becomes."

"Then all life upon the Earth is going to cease? So, after all that mankind has been through, after all the enemies we've vanquished, we come to an end — and it is not the fault of a single soul upon the planet?"

"I didn't say that."

# UNIVERSE X

I S S U E 1

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"I'M SEEING **STEVE STRANGE**, ISAAC. HE WAS IN A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.

"THIS HAPPENED LONG BEFORE STEVE'S COMA, YEARS BEFORE HE EVEN BECAME **MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS**.



"BACK WHEN HE WAS A SURGEON AND HIS ABILITY TO SAVE WAS LIMITED ONLY TO THE **PHYSICAL WORLD**. WHEN A LIFE'S WORTH WAS MEASURED BY ITS IMPACT ON STEVE'S **BANK ACCOUNT**.

"THE ACCIDENT CAUSED EXTENSIVE NERVE DAMAGE TO HIS **HANDS**. HE WAS TOLD HE WAS NO LONGER CAPABLE OF BEING A SURGEON. HE BECAME A **VAGRANT** INSTEAD.

"BUT ONE DAY, HE HEARD OF A MAN SAID TO BE ABLE TO **HEAL**.

"NOT WITH A KNIFE OR A NEEDLE AS STEVE HAD, BUT WITH A **GLANCE**. A **TOUCH**.

"HE TRACKED THIS HEALER DOWN TO THE FAR CORNERS OF THE EARTH AND CAME UPON HIS HOME IN THE **HIMALAYAS**.

"THE **ANCIENT ONE** TAUGHT STEVE THAT HIS SUFFERING MEANT SOMETHING.



HE TAUGHT STEVE THAT THERE WAS **MORE** TO LIFE THAN WHAT HAD BEEN DETERMINED UPON THE OPERATING TABLE.

"HE TAUGHT STEVE HOW TO SEE ANOTHER WORLD BY MAKING HIM A STUDENT OF THE **INVISIBLE ARTS**.







"FORGIVE ME, KYLE, BUT PERHAPS THE ACCIDENT THAT BEFELL STEPHEN COULD HAVE BEEN AVERTED HAD HE PAID MORE ATTENTION TO *HIMSELF*."

"BUT, ISAAC, WHO COULD BLAME HIM FOR THINKING HE HAD *NOTHING TO FEAR*?"

"HE WAS GIVEN THE *ORB* AND THE *EYE OF AGAMOTTO*... AMAZING MAGICAL DEVICES THAT ALLOWED HIM TO SEE TO PLACES *NO ONE* ON EARTH EVER HAD BEFORE."

"MAYBE HE TRUSTED IN THESE THINGS *TOO MUCH*, ISAAC, I DON'T KNOW."

"IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE STEVE BECAME A *MASTER* AND RETURNED TO NEW YORK."

"WHERE, THANKS TO HIS MANSERVANT *WONG*, HE WORKED TO SAVE THE *SOUL* OF THE CITY, OFTEN-TIMES WITHOUT NEED FOR MONEY OR PAYMENT OF ANY KIND."

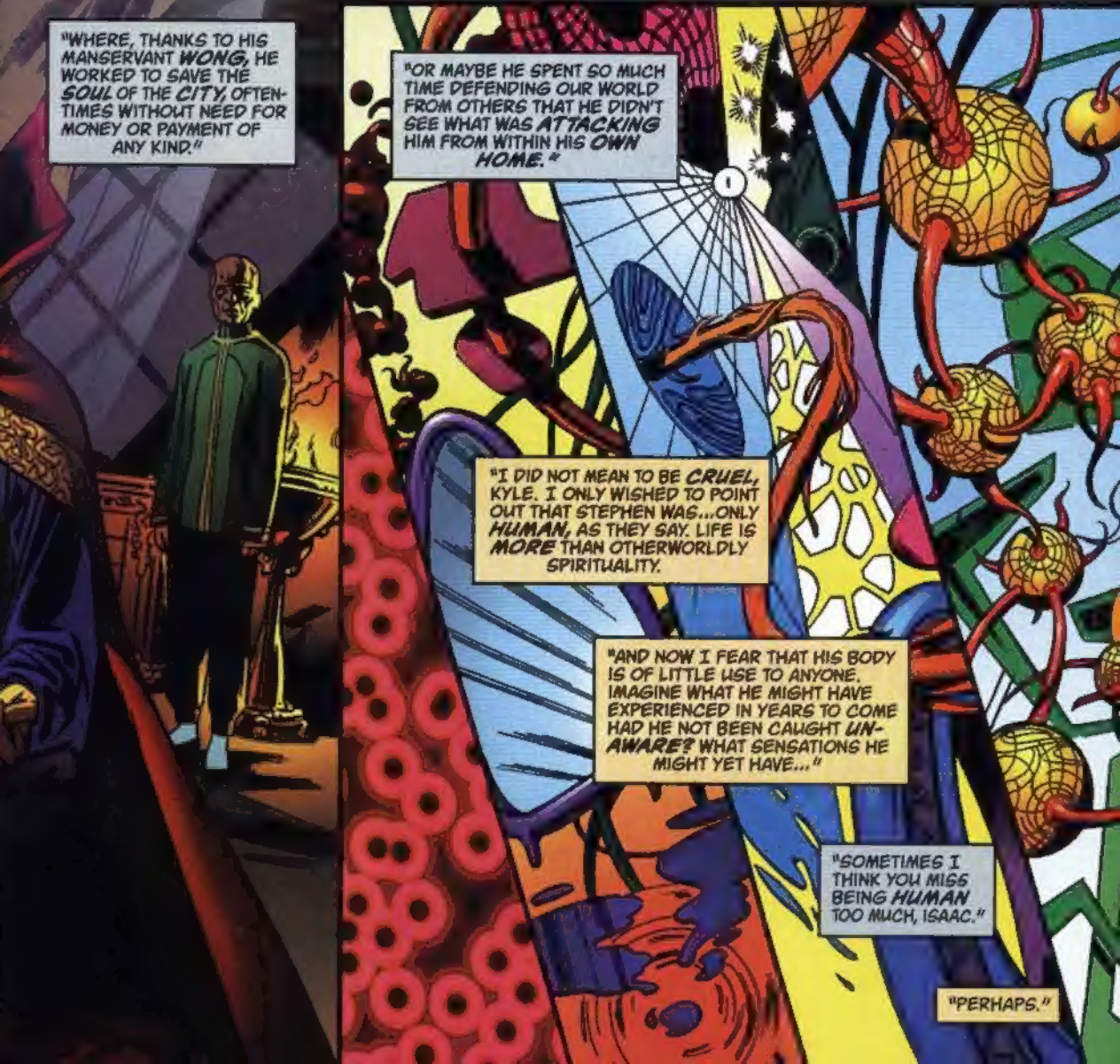
"OR MAYBE HE SPENT SO MUCH TIME DEFENDING OUR WORLD FROM OTHERS THAT HE DIDN'T SEE WHAT WAS *ATTACKING* HIM FROM WITHIN HIS *OWN HOME*."

"I DID NOT MEAN TO BE *CRUEL*, KYLE. I ONLY WISHED TO POINT OUT THAT STEPHEN WAS...*ONLY HUMAN*, AS THEY SAY. LIFE IS *MORE* THAN OTHERWORLDLY SPIRITUALITY."

"AND NOW I FEAR THAT HIS BODY IS OF LITTLE USE TO ANYONE. IMAGINE WHAT HE MIGHT HAVE EXPERIENCED IN YEARS TO COME HAD HE NOT BEEN CAUGHT *UN-AWARE*? WHAT SENSATIONS HE MIGHT YET HAVE..."

"SOMETIMES I THINK YOU MISS BEING *HUMAN* TOO MUCH, ISAAC."

"PERHAPS."





"STEVE LEARNED TO RESPECT *EXISTENCE*. LIFE ITSELF. NOT FOR WHAT IT WOULD BRING HIM, BUT FOR WHAT IT WAS. HE LEARNED HOW TO SERVE IT SHOULD IT EVER ATTEMPT TO *DESTROY* HIM AGAIN.

"THIS IS WHY STEVE BECAME THE KEEPER AND CARETAKER OF A VAST TREASURE OF MAGICAL ITEMS. *THE BOOK OF VISHANTI. THE DARK-HOLD. THE SIEGE PERILOUS.*

"STEVE DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO KEEPING THESE ITEMS AND COUNTLESS OTHERS FROM THOSE WHO WOULD USE THEM FOR EVIL. PEOPLE LIKE *DOOM*. FORCES LIKE THOSE OF *THE ADVERSARY*."

"KYLE? WHAT ARE YOU SPEAKING OF?"

"I'M TALKING ABOUT *EVIL*, ISAAC.

"I'M TALKING ABOUT *MEPHISTO*."

"STEVE'S ENEMIES WEREN'T FOUND ON EARTH. THEY CAME FROM *UNSEEN PLACES*."

"FROM DREAM REALMS AND CHAOS SPHERES. THEY WERE BORN FROM DISILLUSIONMENT AND MISTRUST."

"FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MIRROR AND THE DARKNESS THAT GROWS LARGER THE DARKER IT BECOMES."

"NOT EVEN YOU AND I COULD FATHOM THE FOES STRANGE WAS PREPARING US TO FACE. HE WAS PREPARING US TO FIGHT THE *SHADOWS* THAT COULD NOT BE SEEN BY THE LIGHT OF REASON."

"YOU AND I ARE NOT STRANGERS TO OTHER WORLDS, KYLE. IN THE DEFENDERS ALONE, WE FACED..."

"YES, ISAAC. *THE DEFENDERS*."

"THE JOKE OF THE SUPER HERO SET. THE NON-TEAM WITH A NON-MEMBERSHIP FIGHTING NON-ENEMIES."





"IS THAT WHAT YOU **REALLY** BELIEVE, ISAAC? WE FOUGHT **DRACULA** TOGETHER. WAS HE MERELY A MUTATION?"

"WE CREATE OUR OWN DEMONS, KYLE. THIS IS THE **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**."

"STRANGE KNEW THAT DRACULA WAS MORE THAN OUR DEFINITION OF HORROR COULD FATHOM.

"WE THOUGHT DRACULA WAS A MAN WHO HAD BECOME A **MONSTER**. HE WASN'T. HE WAS A MONSTER ATTEMPTING TO BECOME A **MAN**. HUMAN BLOOD ONLY SUSTAINED THE ILLUSION. IT NEVER COMPLETED IT."

"CAN A MONSTER BECOME A MAN?"

"DON'T YOU SEE? LONG BEFORE THE CELESTIALS EVEN INVADED THE BIOLOGY OF OUR WORLD, SOMETHING **ELSE** WAS ALREADY HERE, TRYING TO BREAK FROM ONE EXISTENCE INTO ANOTHER."

"AND NOT JUST **ONE** REALM. THIS IS WHY THERE NEEDED TO BE **DEFENDERS**. STEVE NEEDED HELP."

"HE THOUGHT HE'D FOUND AN ALLY AS WELL AS A DISCIPLE IN **CLEA**."

"BUT SHE BETRAYED HIM AND KILLED HIS **ASTRAL FORM** USING MAGICS HE HIMSELF HAD TAUGHT HER."

"YOU MENTIONED BEFORE, KYLE, THAT **SUFFERING** SERVED SOME PURPOSE. WHAT IS IT?"

"BUT KYLE, IF THERE WERE EVER AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF THESE TYPES OF BEINGS, THIS WORLD WE LIVE UPON WOULD BE IT."


"**DEMONS** ARE THE RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENTS EXACTED UPON EARLY MAN. YOU YOURSELF HAVE DESCRIBED THE **CELESTIAL MANIPULATION** OF MANKIND. SUPERSTITIONS CREATE SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION."

"I DON'T KNOW. SUFFERING FUELS **SOMETHING**. STEVE WAS BETRAYED BEFORE HE FOUND OUT WHAT THAT WAS."






YOU  
DON'T KNOW  
HOW *EASY* IT  
IS TO BETRAY  
SOMEONE  
YOU LOVE,  
KYLE.




*YES I  
DO.* I'VE SPENT  
HALF MY LIFE EITHER  
BETRAYING SOME  
IDEAL OR A PERSON  
I CARE FOR.

AND  
THE OTHER  
HALF?


IS SPENT  
TRYING TO FIND  
THE STRENGTH  
TO SAY, "I'M  
SORRY."



THESE  
VOLUMES WE  
CATALOG WILL  
VINDICATE OUR  
PAST WRONGS,  
KYLE.




"WE WRITE *HISTORY*, ISAAC. AND PERHAPS  
NOT VERY WELL AT ALL IF WE HAVE TO *RE-  
WRITE* OUR PLACE IN IT."



"THE WORLD'S ECOSYSTEM IS  
*OUT OF CONTROL.*"

"EARTH'S *POLARITY* HAS CHANGED. IF YOU AND I  
DECIDED TO LEAVE NEW YORK, I COULDN'T TELL  
YOU WHICH DIRECTION WAS *SOUTH*. FOR *SOUTH*  
NO LONGER EXISTS."





"IF THE COLD DOESN'T KILL YOU, THE **SONS OF SET** WILL."


THESE MURDERS ARE SACRIFICES. THEY KILL FOR **POWER**.

FOR THEMSELVES?

NO. FOR THEIR **GOD**.


SOME BELIEVE THAT THE LETTING OF **BLOOD** OPENS A DOOR TO ANOTHER WORLD.

THEY ARE FEEDING **SET**.



I'M SORRY.


THIS COLLECTION IS **IMPERATIVE** TO MY RETURN. I KNOW YOU'D RATHER NOT BE **NURSE-MAIDING** A CHILD.



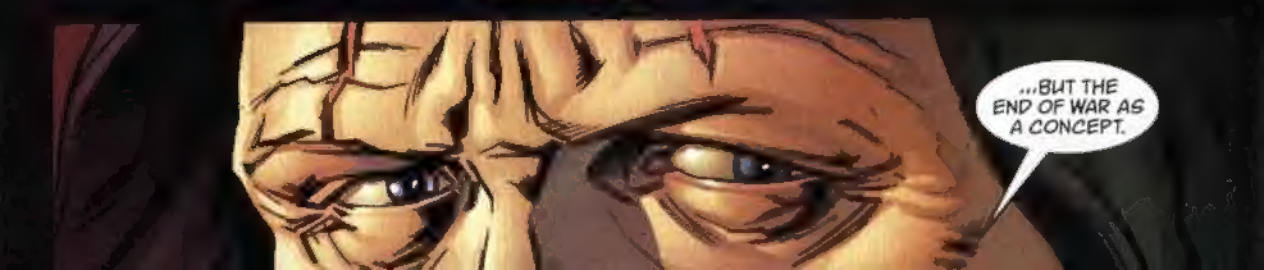
STOP IT, MAR-VELL. YOU'VE EXPERIENCED FAR MORE THAN I **EVER** WILL.

I'VE SEEN THIS SORT OF THING ALL MY LIFE...IN EVERY WAR I'VE FOUGHT.

REED RICHARDS SAID YOU COULD **CHANGE** ALL THIS.



WHAT YOU ARE HERE FOR ISN'T ANOTHER BATTLE FOR ME...



...BUT THE END OF WAR AS A CONCEPT.









NOT AGAIN.



JACK!  
JULES!

I'VE GOT YOU, SON.



SO C-C-COLD-D-D...



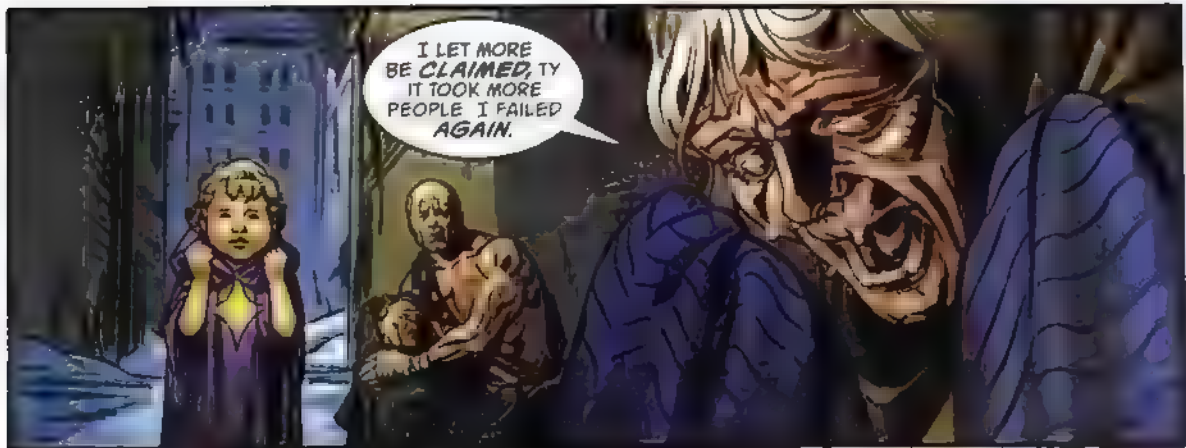
GET WARM.



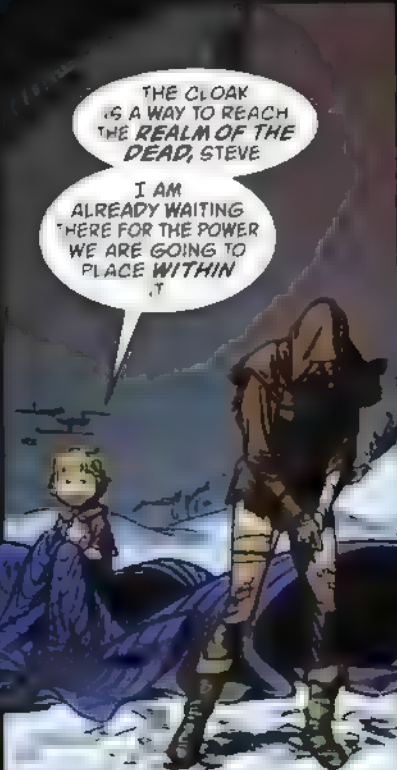
I...I SAW  
K-K-KATIE. B-B-BUT  
TH-TH-THAT'S N-N-NOT  
P-P-P-POSSIBLE.

SH-SHE DIED  
TEN YEARS  
AGO.










THE CLOAK  
IS A WAY TO REACH  
THE REALM OF THE  
DEAD, STEVE

I AM  
ALREADY WAITING  
HERE FOR THE POWER  
WE ARE GOING TO  
PLACE WITHIN  
IT



WHAT'S  
NEXT?




"THE ORB OF  
AGAMOTTO.  
THE EYE IS  
LOST TO US IN  
THE GOLDEN  
REALM."




STEVE?  
GET IN IT'S ALSO  
A TELEPORTATION  
DEVICE

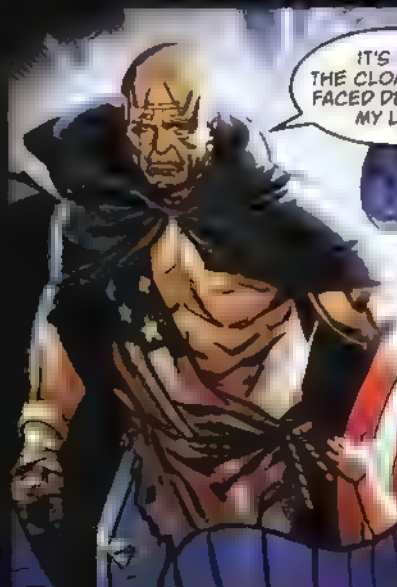
DON'T  
WORRY




IT'S NOT  
THE CLOAK... I'VE  
FACED DEATH ALL  
MY LIFE



IT'S  
SOMETHING  
ELSE DON'T YOU  
SEE IT? WE'RE  
BEING FOL-  
LOWED



WHAT IS THIS  
CREATURE YOU  
SPEAK OF, KYLE?



"I CAN'T SAY, ISAAC  
BUT IT IS FAMILIAR"





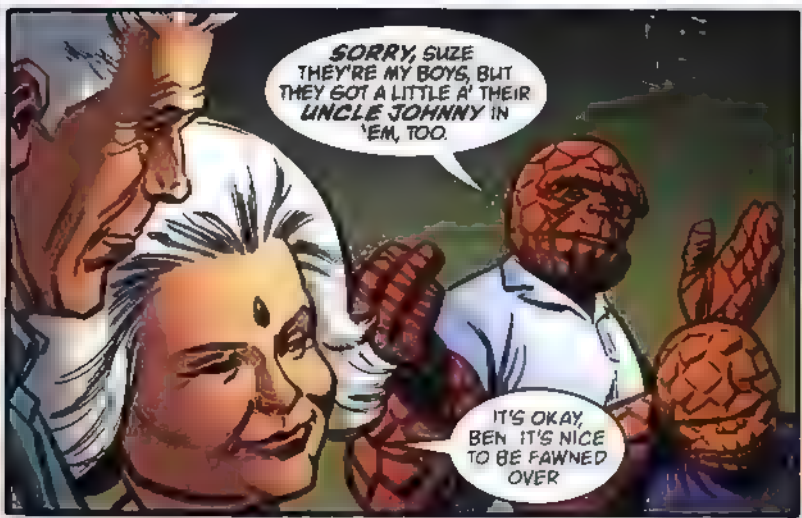
IN LATVER A  
REED RICHARDS'  
REUNION WITH HIS  
LATE WIFE IS **SHORT-  
LIVED**, AND THE LITTLE  
HOPE IT BRINGS HIM  
WILL BE **INTERRUPTED**  
SOME TIME  
TOMORROW

OF ALL THE  
WEEKENDS TO BE CAMP'N  
W **UNCLE WYATT**, WE PICK  
THE ONE WHEN WE'D MISS  
A **NAKED CHICK!**

THIS  
**STINKS**  
WORSE'N  
DAD



HEY!  
THAT'S YER  
**AUNT SUZY** YER  
YAPPIN' ABOUT, YA  
HORMONE-HAPPY  
DEGENERATES!



**SORRY, SUZE**  
THEY'RE MY BOYS, BUT  
THEY GOT A LITTLE A' THEIR  
**UNCLE JOHNNY** IN  
'EM, TOO.

IT'S OKAY,  
BEN. IT'S NICE  
TO BE FAWNED  
OVER



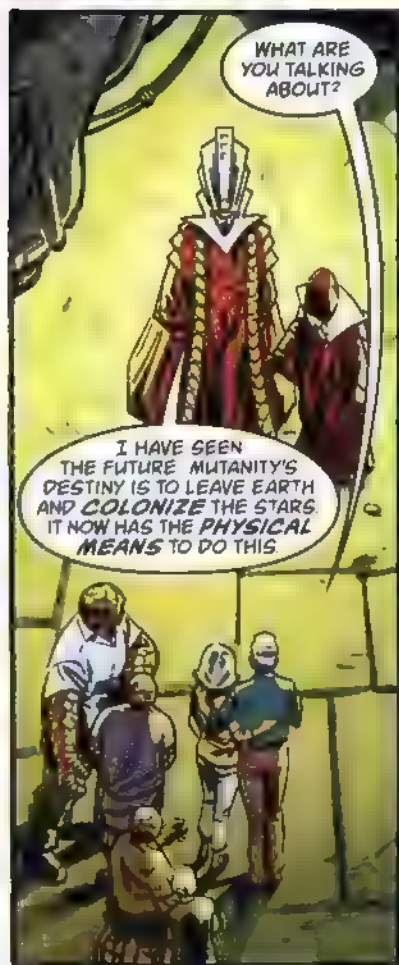
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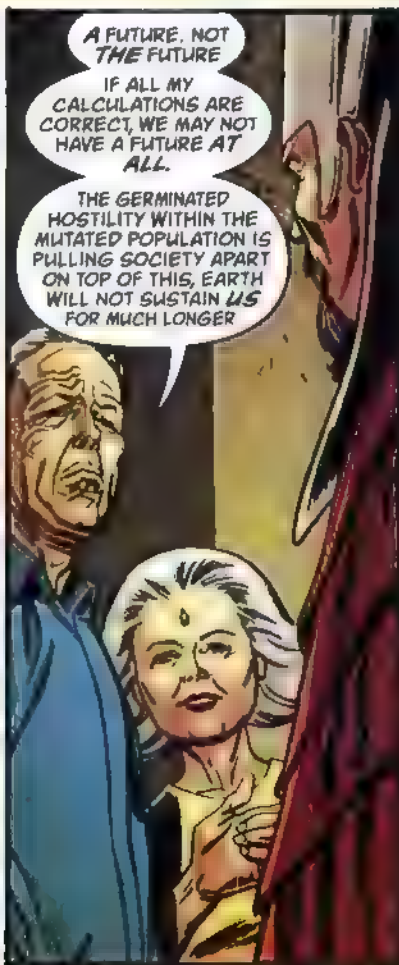
YOUR TORCHES  
ARE CRIPPLING YOUR  
WORLD'S PEOPLE, RICHARDS  
DOUSE THEM

IMMORTUS?



WHAT ARE  
YOU TALKING  
ABOUT?

I HAVE SEEN  
THE FUTURE. MUTANITY'S  
DESTINY IS TO LEAVE EARTH  
AND COLONIZE THE STARS.  
IT NOW HAS THE PHYSICAL  
MEANS TO DO THIS.



A FUTURE, NOT  
THE FUTURE.  
IF ALL MY  
CALCULATIONS ARE  
CORRECT, WE MAY NOT  
HAVE A FUTURE AT  
ALL.

THE GERMINATED  
HOSTILITY WITHIN THE  
MUTATED POPULATION IS  
PULLING SOCIETY APART.  
ON TOP OF THIS, EARTH  
WILL NOT SUSTAIN US  
FOR MUCH LONGER.



I HAVE SEEN  
NO FAR-REACHING  
DANGER TO THE  
PLANET.





THE BALANCE OF **VIBRANIUM** AT THE CORE HAS BEEN DEPLETED. AS A RESULT OF...**GALACTUS'** SAVING EARTH FROM THE CELESTIALS, EARTH'S MASS IS BEGINNING TO **CHANGE**. THE PLANET'S **POLARITY** HAS ALREADY BEEN **ALTERED**.

THE SMALLEST CHANGE IS ALL IT WILL TAKE TO **NEGATE** OUR ATMOSPHERE A DECIMAL POINT IS ALL THAT KEEPS EARTH IN ITS ORBIT

WE CANNOT STAY HERE. WE HAVE TO WORK **TOGETHER**...BUT THAT'S NOT ABOUT TO HAPPEN IN OUR CURRENT MUTATED STATE



YES YES BUT LET ME SHOW YOU A **VISION** OF THE FUTURE, **RICHARDS**

THANK YOU, **SPIDERS MAN**.



IF EARTH IS GOING TO DIE, WHAT **BETTER** WAY TO PLAN OUR EXODUS THAN BY **LEAVING** A WORLD WE NO LONGER NEED TO SURVIVE?





MUTANITY WILL ENSLAVE EVERY RACE THEY COME ACROSS THIS IS NOT COLONIZATION

IT'S MORE BEFITTING KANG THAN YOURSELF



TO MENTION MY PAST IDENTITY IS BENEATH YOU RICHARDS

I'M CERTAIN YOU CAN OVERLOOK MY HOSTILITY



IF THE HUMAN TORCHES ARE EXTINGUISHED HUMANITY WILL NEVER BE REESTABLISHED

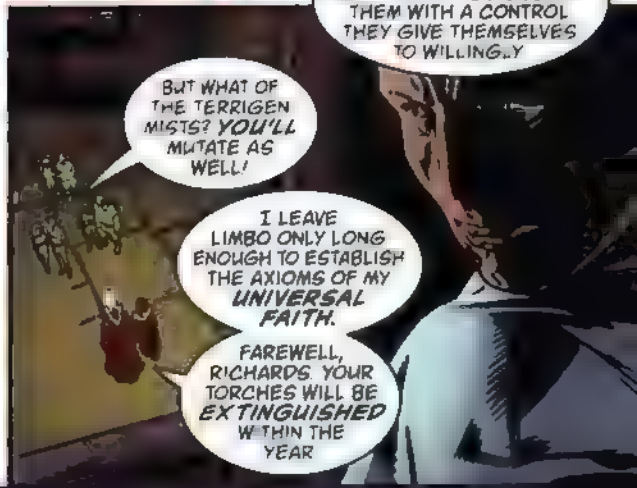
MUTANITY LIKES ITS POWER IT WILL FIGHT TO PROTECT IT

BUT APPEAL TO THEIR SUPERSTITION AND YOU CAN SUBVERT THEM WITH A CONTROL THEY GIVE THEMSELVES TO WILLINGLY



SO YOU'LL MANIPULATE THEM YOU'LL LIE?

I OFFER THE OPPORTUNITY TO KEEP WHAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO TAKE AWAY



BUT WHAT OF THE TERRIGEN MISTS? YOU'LL MUTATE AS WELL!

I LEAVE LIMBO ONLY LONG ENOUGH TO ESTABLISH THE AXIOMS OF MY UNIVERSAL FAITH

FAREWELL, RICHARDS YOUR TORCHES WILL BE EXTINGUISHED WITHIN THE YEAR



YOU HAVE NO AUTHORITY OVER US, PRIMITIVE WE WERE BORN IN THE HIDDEN REALM. WE ARE PURE INHUMANS

YOUR NEWFOUND POWER IS OUR HERITAGE. THIS FOOD IS A FITTING TRIBUTE

I SAID HOLD IT RIGHT THERE.

SO AM I SUPPOSED TO READ YOU YOUR CRIMINAL RIGHTS, OR YOUR ANIMAL RIGHTS?

LET'S JUST SAY YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN STUPID AND LEAVE IT AT THAT

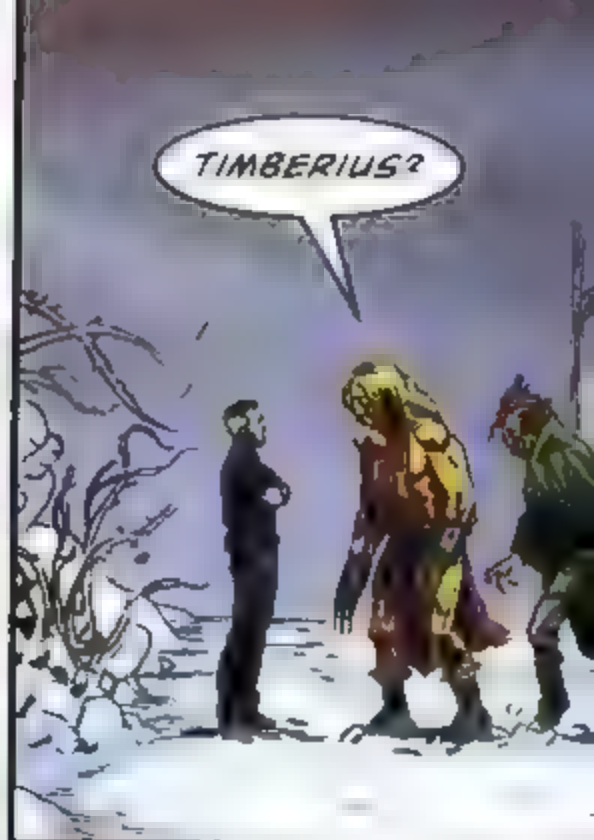
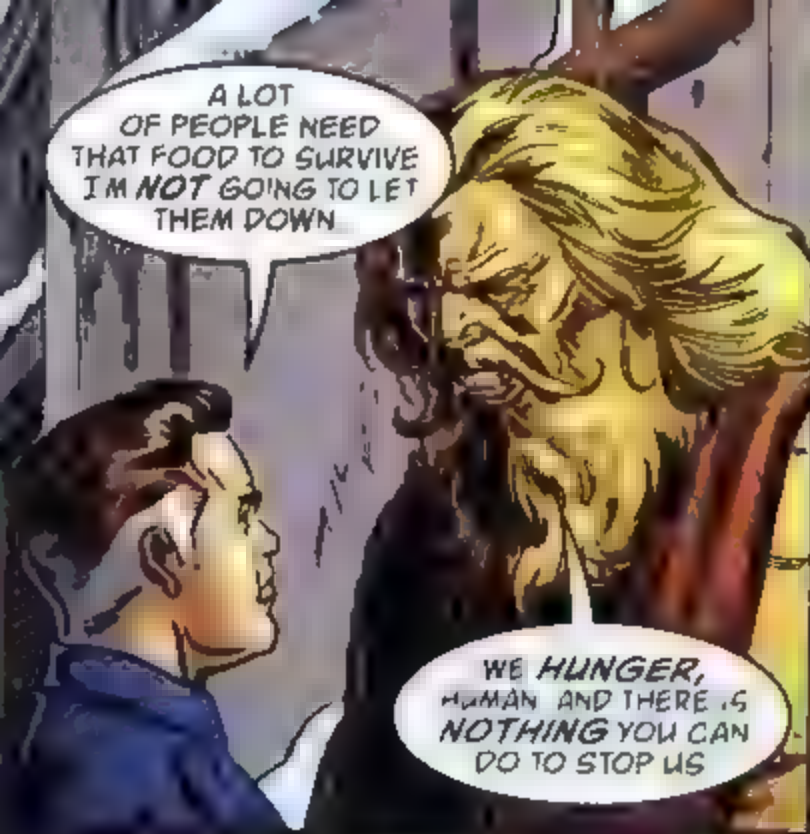


HOoves IN THE AR MR ED

TURN AND LEAVE. I WARN YOU NOT TO GET INVOLVED

SORRY BUT IT'S MY JOB.









"I LIKE BEING IN  
THE KING'S COURT AGAIN  
EH? MBERUS?"

LEAVE THE  
RATIONS FOR THE  
WEAK. WE WILL  
SUPPLY ALL YOUR  
NEEDS

THERE IS A  
PLACE FOR YOU  
A DESTINY FOR  
YOU.

BECOME  
ONE WITH THE  
UNIVERSAL  
CHURCH OF  
IMMORTUS.

I HAVE  
A SENSE ABOUT  
THIS SORT OF THING  
I KNOW IT'S AN  
ILLUSION.



BY THE WAY,  
I'M NOT ALL THAT  
SURE THAT IMITATION  
IS THE SINCEREST FORM  
OF FLATTERY.

THE  
CHURCH OF  
IMMORTUS  
WISHES NO  
ONE TO GO  
HUNGRY

THANK  
YOU FOR DOING  
YOUR JOB, OFFICER  
YOUR CITY'S RATIONS  
WILL REMAIN UN-  
TOUCHED.



TALK  
ABOUT BEING  
HIT BY THE UGLY  
STICK...

HEY  
DON'T I  
KNOW  
YOU?

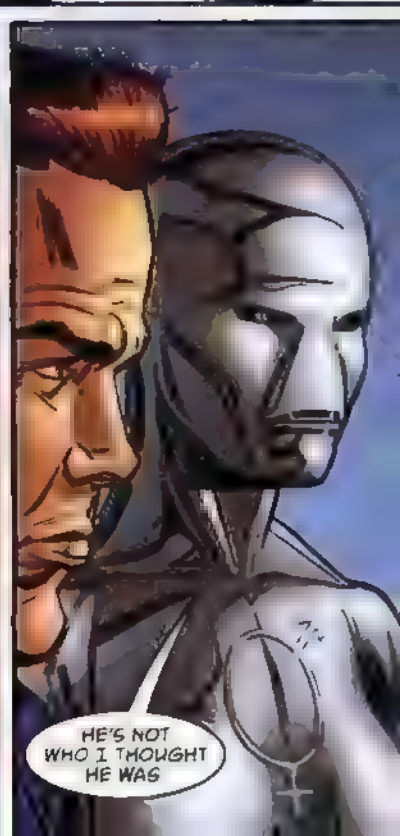


YEAH. MY  
DAUGHTER MAY  
FOUGHT YOU BACK  
DURING THE WHOLE  
SKULL THING I WAS  
A COUPLE OF POUNDS  
HEAVIER THEN IF YOU  
DON'T REMEM-  
BER

I  
THOUGHT  
SPIDERS MAN  
WAS YOUR  
FRIEND



I DID  
TOO



HE'S NOT  
WHO I THOUGHT  
HE WAS





WHAT  
HAPPENED  
TO **STEVE'S**  
PLACE?

STRUCK BY  
LIGHTNING

STRANGE  
HAD SOME BOOKS  
OF ANCIENT POWER  
AS WELL I WILL **NEED**  
THEM ON THE OTHER  
SIDE



**MINDLESS**  
**ONES** AS LONG AS  
WE DON'T **TOUCH** THEM,  
WE HAVE NOTHING TO  
WORRY ABOUT

HOW CAN  
**WONG** TAKE CARE  
OF STEVE'S BODY WITH  
THIS GOING ON? IT'S  
**INSANE.**



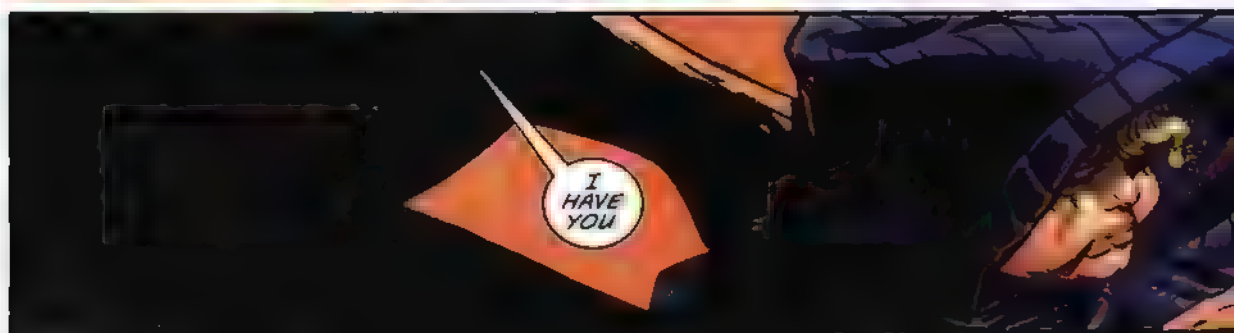
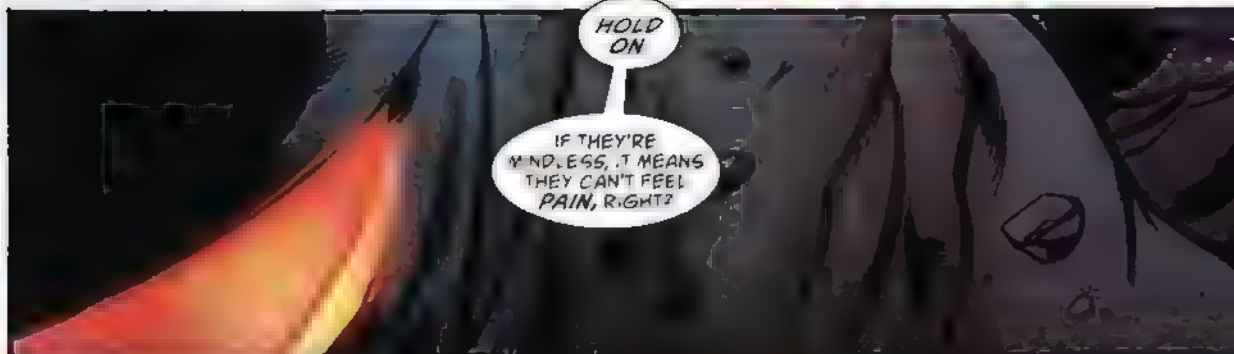
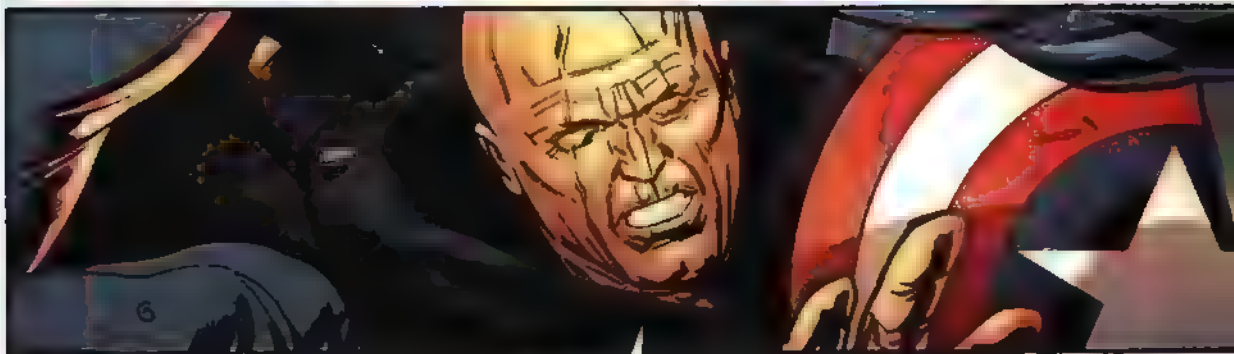
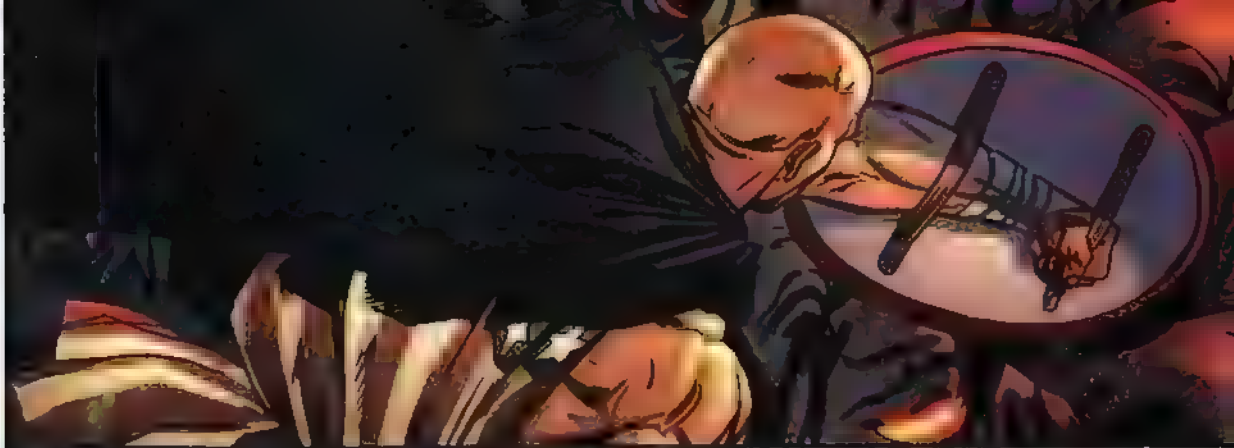
STRANGE  
ISN'T EVEN  
HERE

THE  
**ORB** IS GONE  
AS WELL  
MAR-VELL

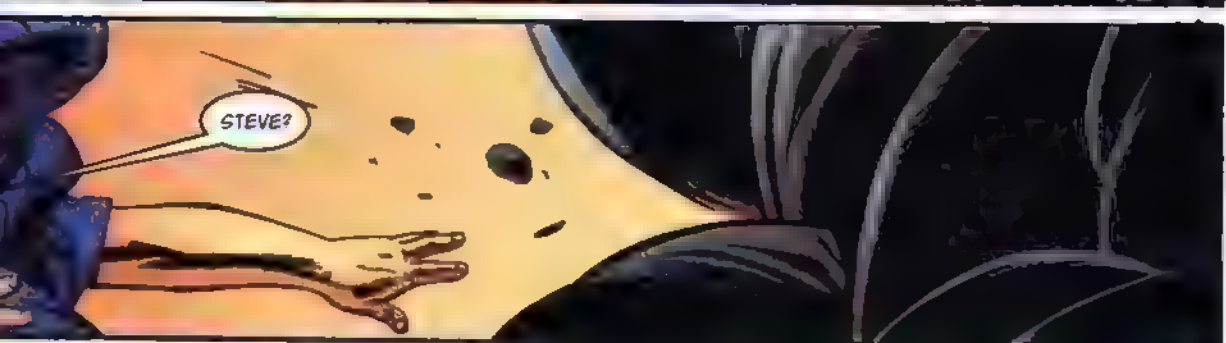
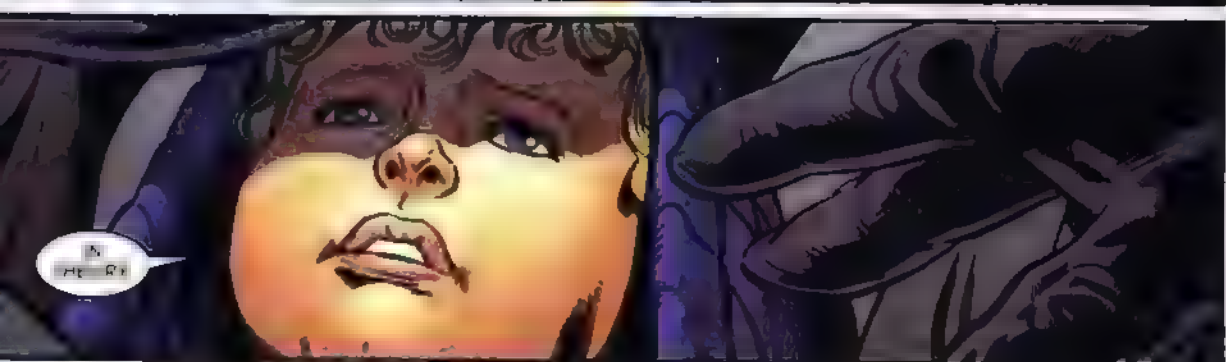
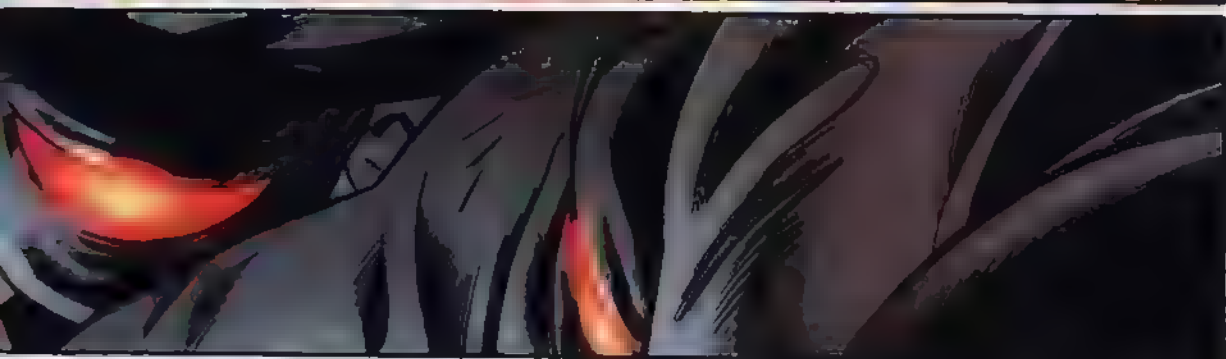


MAR-VELL?













I AM PLEASED YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE ME.

HELLO, LOKI.

LOKI?

THE BOOKS OF VISHANTI AND THE DARKHOLD WERE HIDDEN WITH KING BRITAIN IN THE SIEGE PERILOUS.

YOU'LL DISCOVER THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE ORB THERE.

WE CAN'T TRUST YOU, LOKI. YOU KNOW THAT.



THE AVENGERS ARE DEAD BECAUSE OF YOU.

YOU'VE TRIED TO KILL YOUR BROTHER AT EVERY TURN. WHEN STEPHEN'S ASTRAL FORM WAS MURDERED, YOU WERE IN CLEA'S EMBRACE. YOU WERE HER LOVER.

WAS I? THE GOD I REMEMBER MYSELF BEING KNEW NOTHING OF LOVE.



I WAS THE ONE WHO TIPPED OFF STRANGE TO CLEA'S PLAN OF BETRAYING HIM.

THAT'S WHY YOUR ENTIRE CITY HAS NOT BEEN OVERRUN BY DEMONS--STRANGE CAST A CONTAINMENT SPELL AROUND HIS HOME.

ONE LAST WARNING. CLEA HAD HELP WHEN SHE KILLED STRANGE...AND IT WASN'T MINE.



NOW THE QUESTION IS, WAS THAT A LIE?





I AM CERTAIN THESE RUINS  
HOLD WITHIN THEM SOME KEY  
TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT  
UATU WON'T EXPLAIN TO ME.

WHY, WHEN FRANKLIN CLEARLY  
BECAME GALACTUS, DID UATU'S  
EQUIPMENT SHOW HIM DYING  
AT THE HANDS OF THE SENTINELS?

WAS IT FRANKLIN  
WHOM I SAW KILLED?




OR DOES THE BEING  
WHO NOW BELIEVES  
HE IS GALACTUS ALSO  
FALSELY BELIEVE HE IS  
FRANKLIN RICHARDS?

OR WHAT IF BOTH  
ARE FRANKLIN? OR  
NEITHER IS?

FATHER ALWAYS SAID  
THAT EVERY SCIENTIFIC  
DISCOVERY BEGAN WITH  
THOSE TWO WORDS:

"WHAT IF?"



"If we never looked at things and  
thought what they might be, we'd  
still be in the tall grass with the  
apes."  
— James Goldman,  
*They Might Be Giants*





# APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ONE

W R I T T E N   B Y   J I M   K R U E G E

"X-51?"

"Yes, Uatu?"

"You have kept your word and reconnected me to the world. Much has changed. I can hear your planet's eco-structure shifting. I can hear the slow cracks forming in the polar ice caps. Your people are becoming scared. They are hungry. And for those used to the cold, they fear the beads of sweat forming on their brow. For those accustomed to the tropics, they cannot stop the chattering of their bones."

"Yes, Uatu. I know. New York will soon become a frozen wasteland."

"How do you know this?"

"Kyle Richmond has eyes that allow him to peer into the future. He and Isaac Christians..."

"The Gargoyle."

"Yeah. Christians is writing down Richmond's visions of the future to act as sort of a history for generations to learn from. And while the chronology of what Richmond sees is not perfectly ordered, the intent is easily understood. The polarity of the planet has shifted due to the death of the Celestial within."

"I warned you of this, X-51. I told you that there was no way to save your world."

"But there was a way. Reed Richards found it. His son had the power to both defend the world from your masters, the Celestials, and destroy the Celestial that grew within the impregnated planet Earth. He saved everyone."

"For how long?"

"Every moment counts, Uatu."

"Does it?"

"What?"

"I speak of time and history, X-51. Does every moment, every measurable fraction when added upon itself, truly "count"? I have shown you whole races that have risen and fallen. I have shown you birth and death – and what has it amounted to?"

"I don't know, Uatu. Perhaps it only counts in the present. Perhaps history itself is as cruel as your masters and yourself. Maybe history makes one cruel. But in this moment right now, wouldn't humanity choose life over death?"

"If the choice were theirs to make, X-51, but it is not. Your victory does nothing to suggest that your people's purpose is anything greater than biological. The lifespan of your race has not increased, only perhaps the span of a finitude of individuals."

"Remind me again why I needed

to speak with you? Why I bothered to let you back into the world?"

"You have begun to see visions of alternate history, X-51."

"Call me Aaron."

"As I was saying, X-51, you have need of answers. Are these answers less important than the label by which I refer to you?"

"I was afraid. Franklin Richards came to me believing himself to be the world devourer. He came wanting to know who Franklin Richards really was. When I showed him his history, his destiny was different. He did not become Galactus and forget who he was. Instead, he was slain by the mutant-hunting Sentinels in a present very different than this one. How could that be?"

"The answer is simple, X-51. This reality you cling to and hold so dear to for your very meaning and purpose is but a glimmer of all that is. It is a wink in the cosmic order of being. A fraction of history that hardly 'counts' at all."

"I've heard of alternate realities... but why would your equipment choose to show that specific fate for Franklin?"

"It did not. You did."

"No, I didn't."

"Come now, X-51. Must you always give life to inanimate machines?"

"Runs in the family."

"Of course it does. All the secrets of this citadel are yours to use as you will. It is your will that is flawed. It is a mix of machine and your accursed programmed humanity."

"I don't understand."

"I assume Galactus came wanting to know more about his true identity – Franklin Richards. I also assume that this quest of the Devourer placed you in a position of... how would those you are programmed to mock put it... oh yes, a moral dilemma."

"We've been through this before, Uatu. There is no good. There is no evil. There is only change. I know that is what you believe. Get on with it."

"Yes. I can see that patience is one of the human virtues that you have not been programmed with. So you were placed in the dilemma. Do you reveal what you know of Franklin? Do you undo all the heroics and self-denial of Reed Richards for the sake of the entire universe? Or do you become myself? A manipulator of history according to your own agenda?"

"That's not fair, Uatu."

"Fairness? Do you know me so little? How amazing that your species continues to justify itself while failing to uphold even its own flawed law."





"What do you mean?"

"You killed the Celestial, X-51. Your species killed for the sake of its own survival. You made a decision that one life was more important than another."

"It was self-defense. One life against billions."

"So you did the "right" thing, is that it, X-51?"

"Yes. Of course. How can you...?"

"I can because I have watched you for years. You claim to be in touch with something higher than your animalistic survival-of-the-fittest mentality, but you are not. You force your higher hopes into positions of justifiable servitude to the needs of the moment. Right and wrong are situational justifications, X-51. Galactus is a murderer on the cosmic scale."

"But there has to be a balance."

"There does? Are you the authority on the matter of what ought to be amongst the universe?"

"But?"

"Your laws of morality, while sounding noble in times of peace and prosperity, are little more than children's brawls at recess. They are 'Says Who' arguments with no substantiation. Attempts to control each other with the hope that you are something greater than you are. And when the Celestials made that fallow hope a reality, you struck at them. I told you long ago that mankind's nature is to strike at its own gods. This is the reason your "heroes" were the objects of scorn and hatred. This is the reason that in one reality, the robot enforcers known as the Sentinels exterminated every hero on Earth. It was Franklin's death in this reality that served your need for a solution to the Galactus problem."

"My solution?"

"Your programmed fear triggered the citadel's equipment in such a way that it switched from the reality where Franklin becomes Galactus and it focussed upon one of the alternative realities – one that featured the death of Franklin Richards instead of his subsequent transformation. Now, if I have given you enough to satisfy your imagined curiosity, I have some questions of my own."

"Okay, Uatu. What do you want to know?"

"I am concerned regarding these eyes you speak of."

"They were given to Kyle Richmond by Mephisto."

"Then it is true."

"What?"

"I have been separated from my brethren and am damned."

"What do you mean? How can someone without a moral structure as yourself be damned?"

"This means nothing to you or to your fool's errand of protecting the masses who live upon your world. The consequence is mine alone. And that is how it will remain."

"These alternatives you speak of?"

"Yes?"

"They have Watchers of their own?"

"Yes."

"Earths of their own?"

"Yes."

"Are these Earth's also... Impregnated?"

"Tell me of what has happened these last three years. What has occurred since you cut me off from the world?"

"You didn't answer my question, Uatu."

"Again, you do not require an answer. I, on the other hand, must know what is going on upon the Earth."

"I can see this is going to be a problem, Uatu. I need answers you're not willing to give. And you need to hear of what's going on Earth. I didn't ask

you to change me or make me your replacement after you were blinded by the King of the Inhumans. It was your decision. Your mistake. In the meantime, I need you, too."

"Very well, Machine Man. In exchange for the knowledge I require, I will give you a larger understanding of the nature of reality. This will begin with the knowledge I require."

"Tell me now what has happened. And tell of Richmond's visions and what is about to happen."

"Okay, Uatu. Reed Richards, in cooperation with the other nations and heroes of the Earth, created a device known as the Human Torch. The purpose of this device is to burn the Terrigen Mists from the air so that Reed's cure for the world's mutations can be administered."

"But the world's mutated population is unwilling to give up its power, is it not, X-51?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I have watched your kind since its beginnings, X-51. I know your inclinations. The death of the Celestial within the Earth is destroying your planet. Had you listened to me, perhaps your race might have survived."

"What are you saying, Uatu?"

"I am saying that your race might have evolved to the point at which it was no longer dependent upon this planet for its continued life. I'm saying the coming birth might have been your liberation. Instead, the death of the Celestial fetus has doomed your race."

"I don't believe you, Uatu."

"Why, because I don't fit within your Good vs. Evil grid? Because my purpose for watching your race was biological and not moral, you believe my purpose can only ever be that of the destruction of life? The role of Watcher is to see what is actually happening."

"I did, Uatu. And now I need to know why you still want to watch. I don't think it's out of boredom. I want to know why I'm going to be digging in the ruins of the Kree City here on the moon."

"How should I know?"

"I want to know why Kyle Richmond is having visions of me digging there. What might I find?"

"Ah. You will find that your belief in the good of the universe is far out-rated. And you will find that the deaths you are so eager to prevent are part of the very fabric of the natural order. You see yourself as a hero because you have cheated death. But this is not heroic literature that is being written down by Isaac Christians, X-51. It is tragedy. Now tell me, who has risen up to lead the masses against the controls set upon them by Richards and his antiquated alliances?"

"Immortus. He says he has seen a future where the mutated mankind leaves Earth to colonize the universe. He speaks of a glorious destiny."

"A destiny, as I have shown, that will now be denied mankind because of the death of the Celestial at the heart of the Earth."

"So the vision is wrong. What will happen, Uatu?"

"Look to Richmond, X-51. What does he say?"

"He says it's a waste to write everything down. Because there isn't going to be anyone around to read these histories anyhow."

"That is very doubtful, X-51. I expect that they are being read even while we speak."

